

ATTACHMENT A

LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY RELATING TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Why is the correct terminology important when referring to a person with a disability?

Language is the basis of your thoughts and attitudes about people with disabilities. Terminology continually evolves. Staying current is important, not to show that you are "politically correct," but to communicate effectively and appropriately on the subject of disability. Without being aware of what is current and appropriate language, a person may inadvertently offend another person or convey a message that they did not intend to convey. Using "people first" language emphasizes the individual and not your perception of any possible limitation caused by the presence of a disability.

What does "people first" language mean?

It means that you refer to a "person" first, then to his or her disability. For example, say a "person with a disability" rather than a "disabled person." If you refer to a person by his or her disability, (i.e., blind person, deaf person, etc.), you inappropriately make that characteristic more important than his or her status as a person.

When should I mention that a person has a disability?

Use common sense. Let your choice of words be guided by an awareness of how people prefer to be described. Mention a person's disability only if it is relevant to the issue. If it is not relevant, don't mention it. Even more importantly, when you know a person's name, use it first rather than an indirect reference to a "person with a disability."

How do I avoid segregation when talking about people with disabilities?

Be careful not to use language like "we or they," which suggests segregation. Avoid grouping all individuals with disabilities together. For example, do not refer to a particular group as "the disabled," "the deaf," or "the blind."

I've heard so many different ways to describe persons with disabilities. How do I know what is correct?

Avoid trendy terminology like "challenged," "handi-capable," "differently abled," or "physically challenged." These terms are mostly invented and used by people without disabilities. Some people with disabilities may choose these terms, but the majority believe these terms are condescending and prefer they not be used. Most people with disabilities prefer to be called a "person with a disability" or a "person who has a disability."

What is the proper way to speak to or write about someone who has a disability?

In speaking or writing, remember that children or adults with disabilities are like everyone else -- except they happen to have a disability. Therefore, here are a few tips for improving your language related to disabilities.

- Speak of the person first, then the disability.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
- Don't give unsolicited praise or attention to a person with a disability; don't patronize the person.

How are the words "Impairment," "Disability," and "Handicap" different?

Each of these words has a distinctly different meaning. The following are definitions for each:

- **Impairment:** A deviation from normal development, structure or function. Examples where impairments can occur are: hearing (nerve damage), visual (glaucoma), mobility (crushed vertebrae causing paralysis).
- **Disability:** Refers to a functional limitation. Examples of disabilities are: 75% loss of hearing, tunnel vision, or paralysis from the neck down.
- **Handicap:** A situational disadvantage that people with disabilities often face. Examples of handicaps would be: a place of service not having a teletext typewriter (TTY) so that a person with a hearing loss can directly communicate with them by phone, or a person with tunnel vision not being able to obtain a driver's license. A handicap for a person with paralysis who uses a wheelchair would be when that person can not get into a building because the only entrance has stairs.

What words should I use or avoid when referring to a person with a disability?

| SAY | AVOID |
|---|---|
| Person with a disability | Cripple, Handicap, Invalid |
| Person who has... Person with... | Victim of, stricken with, afflicted with |
| Person who uses a wheelchair | Confined to a wheelchair or bound or restricted to a wheelchair |
| Person without a disability | Normal (implies that people with disabilities are abnormal) |
| Person who is deaf, hard of hearing or without speech who communicates in sign language | Deaf mute, deaf and dumb |
| Person with mental illness or an emotional disorder | Crazy, insane, deranged |
| Person who has seizures | Fits, spastic |
| Person who has a congenital disability or a disability that has existed from birth | Birth defect |
| Person with mental retardation | Retard, imbecile, moron |
| Person who has Down's Syndrome | Mongoloid |
| Person who has Hansen's Disease | Leper, person with leprosy |
| Person who has epilepsy | Epileptic |
| Person who has a condition | Disease (unless it is a disease) |
| Person who has a cleft lip | Harelip |
| Person who has a mobility impairment | Lame |
| Person who is paralyzed | Invalid or paralytic |

| SAY | AVOID |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Person who has hemiplegia | Hemiplegic |
| Person who has quadriplegia | Quadriplegic |
| Person who has paraplegia | Paraplegic |
| Person of short stature | Dwarf or midget |
| Person who has cerebral palsy | Palsied, or C.P., or spastic |

Don't feel intimidated by the terminology. If you use simple terms, that's okay - but remember, simple does not mean childlike. Speak to or about adults like adults. People with disabilities are an integral part of the general public.